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How to cite:

Capdevila, Rose; Hubbard, Katherine and Donnelly, Lois (2019). Standing still whilst 'looking back and moving forwards': the personal accounts of POWS members in the here and now. *Psychology of Women & Equalities Section Review*, 2(1)

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

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**Standing still whilst ‘looking back and moving forwards’: the personal accounts of
POWS members in the here and now**

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Word count: 6384

Accepted for publication:

Psychology of Women and Equalities Section Review on 22nd October 2018

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Abstract

In 2017, the BPS Psychology of Women Section (POWS) celebrated its 30th anniversary. Within the year that succeeded it was re-named the Psychology of Women and Equalities Section (POWES). This paper reflects not only on POWS (as it was named when this research was conducted) as an organization in the past, but also on the everyday accounts of those who are involved with the Section. Using an online survey including a story completion task, we explored how participants (n= 26) came to POWS; what roles they have engaged in within and outside of the section; and how they see POWS and feminist activism in Psychology moving forward. By analysing thematically, core themes around past reflections, a call for a more radical future and some central challenges were identified. We reflect on these findings and discuss how the positive virtues attributed to POWS exist alongside the tensions between embodying either a critic or a conformist status.

Keywords: Psychology of Women, POWS, feminisms, activism, history of Psychology

We came to this project in light of the 30th anniversary of POWS as an organisation (as it was referred to at the time). The anniversary, as is often the case in these moments of commemoration, brought to the fore many reengagements with its 30 years of history as well as thoughts about the future. What had those years meant for activism within academia, and specifically, Feminist Psychology? We were aware that this journal was collecting pieces from past chairs and some of the founding members had been invited to speak at the annual conference. In light of this we thought that, alongside these voices, we might add those of the feminist psychologists who have engaged with POWS in a myriad of other ways over those three decades, as well as those engaging with the section in the present. As Gill (2009) highlights, despite a wealth of work on reflexivity, the actual everyday experiences of academics have largely gone without critical attention. Yet, such stories about POWS from within focus not only on the history of the section but also on an intersectional history of feminisms, psychologies, activisms, gender and generation. They reflect on understandings of affect and embodiment, belonging and exclusion across contexts as well as experiences of looking inward and outward.

The terminology of 'Psychology of Women' is, of course, a contested one (see Burman 2011, Capdevila & Lazard, 2015). Rutherford et al (2010) have argued that the positivist commitments inherent in a psychology of women 'effectively mute its political project, rendering it acceptable to mainstream psychology yet short of its transformative vision' (page 460). As one of the authors has argued elsewhere (Capdevila, 2007), this process of translating ideas in order to position them as legitimate and acceptable to the mainstream runs the risk of losing step with the critical messages it aims to voice. Even as the section was founded, the terminology of 'Psychology of Women' was understood to function as a euphemism for feminist activism within academia. This is manifest within the stories of

our participants who were there ‘at the beginning’. The place of both psychologies and feminisms within wider culture has changed radically since the section was founded yet this issue is live in our data. Any potential drift away from activism and critique was of evident concern to those who spoke to us and participants both attended to and warded against this perceived threat to POWS’ ‘transformative vision’. Against this backdrop, in December 2017, the section changed its name to include the term ‘Equalities’ and POWS became POWES – to reflect the everyday practice of section members and supporters. Likewise, the journal associated with POWS also changed its name from the *Psychology of Women Section Review* (POWSR) to the *Psychology of Women and Equalities Review*, meaning its abbreviated title became POWER – again harking towards a more politically feminist future.

Our research is part of a longstanding practice, integral to feminist psychology - the recuperation and inscription of the history of what Parlee (1975) referred to as the psychology of, against and for women. This tradition, as the POWS 30th Anniversary conference articulated, looks back to move forward. The very first issue of the *Psychology of Women Section Review* included a paper by founding member Sue Wilkinson tracing the history of different traditions within feminist psychology (Wilkinson, 1999) and the relevance of the past has recurred as a theme throughout.

Two current projects resonate strongly with our own. Firstly, the website *Psychology’s Feminist Voices* (www.feministvoices.com) curated by Alex Rutherford, and her team (which includes one of the authors of this paper), captures a wealth of oral history around the key names in the history of feminist psychology. It is an impressive resource that has in many ways transformed our ability to read around, learn about and evidence our past. Stephanie Shields name checks PFV in describing her own fascinating project, which has been running for the past few years: *Transformational Moments in Feminist Psychology* (2015). This project, is in many ways similar to our own in collecting brief stories of lived experience of

feminist activism in psychology. Whilst Shields' study is differently focussed (on transformational moments) and draws on a slightly different demographic (e.g. older, primarily US based feminists), what is consistent is her acknowledgment of the persistence of 'the joy of feminist collaboration' (p. 149). The dominance of positive affect within the stories we collected was palpable, as is often the case in narratives of feminist organising. In analysing these stories of the past and present, along with aspirations for the future, we explore how participants made sense of their experiences of and around POWS.

Method

By using personal informal as well as formal links to POWS, we recruited 26 participants in total. We posted on social media sites such as the 'Psychology of Women Discussion Group' on Facebook which was established by the POWS committee, and twitter where the POWS account also retweeted our call for participants. Some participants were invited via email to take part in the study and we aimed to recruit early-career researchers who had had less official engagement with the section – everyday members and allies so to speak.

In effort to also be reflexive and clear about our own relations to POWS as researchers we would like to note how all three of the authors are POWES members themselves. The first author is a well-established academic who has been involved in the Section for the past 20 years or so in various capacities including on the committee and the Research Board. The second author is an early career academic and at present the book review editor for the section journal and a previous post-graduate prize winner. The third author is a PhD candidate and has been engaged with POWS since the beginning of this project.

We collected our data using Qualtrics survey software. Participants were offered the right to withdraw by a given date and were given the option of remaining anonymous or

choose a name by which they were known in the research process. The study adhered strictly to BPS ethical guidelines and received ethical approval from the two universities which employ the authors. We asked for demographic information about gender by using the open question ‘How would you describe your gender?’ and also asked participants to inform us of other demographic information in an open question ‘Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself? (e.g. information about your academic background or your career trajectory, etc.).’ This question prompted for academic background and career trajectory specifically, so did not explicitly ask about other demographic information such as ethnicity, age, or sexuality. Although many participants did provide this information across their various contributions that data was very limited so in terms of exploring issues of intersectionality, we are unable to speak to the experiences of people of colour in POWS and other marginalised groups such as LGBTQI people. However, the study does consider age and academic position as intersections through which experiences of POWS may differ.

In all, our aim in the basic survey was to collect people’s experiences through four key areas of POWS: the annual conference; the section journal, *Psychology of Women Section Review* (POWSR); the writing retreat; and the student prizes. We also wanted to understand if people were members of the section or the BPS to get a sense of the demographics of those involved with POWS activities, including whether respondents had been members of the committee or not. We asked about engagement in these key areas as well as if participants had any additional commentary about these they wanted to share. Whenever possible, these were presented as open ended questions. Having collected the contextual information, we included three ‘story completion’ (see Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller & Tischner, 2018) style tasks focussed on the past, present and future of POWS (see Appendix 1 for full survey). These were open boxes where participants could respond to the following prompts and were informed to write what first came to mind:

- My first experience of POWS was when...
- When I think of POWS, I...
- If I could make POWS anything I wanted, I would...

Finally, participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow up interview about POWS to expand upon their responses. The data we discuss in this paper is based on the survey data alone. We continued to collect data for different aspects of this project but our analysis in this paper focuses on the survey data collected before the POWS 30th anniversary conference at which we presented an earlier version of this paper.

Of the 26 recruited participants, all but two were women. We saw a range of career stages across participants, and perhaps unsurprisingly, while many were not active members of the committee, they were all actively involved in POWS activities. Most participants had attended and presented at the POWS conference in the past and read the POWS Review, with almost half having published there. However, almost half of the participants were *not* members of POWS. Of those who were members, we recruited more current members than past members. Table 1 sets out the breakdown of participant involvement (note that the categories are not discrete).

N=26	Frequency	Percent (overall)	Percent (out of people who answered question)
Current member	14	54%	56% (n = 25)
Past member	5	19%	45% (n = 11)
Represented POWS	4	15%	22% (n = 18)
Committee member	11	42%	58% (n = 19)
BPS member	18	69%	72% (n = 25)
Belong to other sections	11	42%	61% (n = 18)
Attended conference	23	88%	92% (n = 25)
Presented at a conference	23	88%	100% (n = 23)
Read POWS R	22	85%	100%
Published in POWS R	12	46%	55% (n = 22)
Involved with POWS R	4	15%	18% (n = 22)
Submitted POWS prize	2	8%	8% (n = 25)
Attended writing retreat	7	27%	28% (n = 25)

Table 1: Participant involvement with POWS

Analysis

Each member of the team thematically analysed the data independently to identify consistencies and patterns across the different sources – the qualitative survey questions and the story completion task. We then conferred and discussed each of the themes we had identified. This discussion was very much in tandem and the threads which emerged were all prominent across accounts. We then jointly identified three themes, relevant to POWES, which we considered to be most dominant. We then proceeded to discuss their relevance in relation to a wide range of data. Once this was complete, each researcher took on one theme for further development which then became the subject of subsequent exchanges and discussions. This process produced the analysis presented below.

This focus of this paper will be the three main themes identified: Past Reflections, Radical Futures and Challenges. These are based on the qualitative data collected across all our questions including direct questions about POWS and the story completion task.

Past Reflections

When participants reflected upon their experiences of POWS this was often, but not always, in response to the story completion task question ‘My first experience of POWS was when...’ A relevant point to mention is that in non-specific questions, when people were asked about their experiences, most thought of the conference and spoke about ‘POWS’ more as though referring to the conference not the section *per se*. There were mainly positive comments about past experiences, but some mentioned that there is not enough going on outside the specific events of POWS, again seemingly referring to the conference as ‘POWS’ rather than the section as a whole. In these reflections participants’ responses could be categorised into 5 types of reflection, that POWS was a) a movement, b) a supportive community and environment, c) intellectually stimulating, d) an arena for opportunity, and e) a site of recuperation.

POWS was viewed as a feminist movement within Psychology. It was seen as a hub for feminist researchers within an androcentric and sometimes difficult discipline. This was viewed very positively overall and POWS was celebrated for its ability to deal with complex and controversial issues and its ability to somewhat stand apart from the ivory tower thinking of Psychology and academia more generally:

“It’s feminist, which is essential for our androcentric discipline but also intersectional and more concerned with getting out of the ivory tower than much of psychology.”

“Being part of POWS offers a supportive environment to feminists willing to open up a dialogue about all manner of knotty, theoretical topics, and complex experiences.”

“Its roots in the Psychology of Women conferences was important and it has served an essential function within the BPS.”

While the vast majority of these types of reflections were positive, there was, however, some critique, for example that POWS was now more ‘academic’ and had changed since its more activist beginnings. For instance, a conference several years ago, it was suggested, had been more ‘standard’ than the earliest ones. Our second theme ‘Radical Futures’, which we discuss later in the paper, reflected such critiques. We are also aware that these more positive comments may be a result of the self-selecting nature and recruitment techniques used for this study. It is perhaps not a surprise that those who engage with POWS see value in it. Nonetheless, these reflections positioned POWS as a movement in Psychology from its early days and a movement which was necessary for individuals as well as for Psychology.

Coinciding with the conceptualisation of POWS as a movement, were the factors of community and environment. POWS was seen as supportive, inclusive, nurturing, non-threatening, welcoming, friendly, non-elitist and diverse. While POWS was criticised for engaging members only for specific events (and the conference was cited as the key event) this was countered by references to the online discussion group:

“POWS-ers were all so nurturing... I feel constantly supported by the POWS on-line community and genuinely have a lot of encouragement and fun within the POWS community.”

“...very supportive/non-threatening environment in which to present one's work.”

Such a nurturing and supportive community thus led some participants to describe POWS as an intellectually stimulating environment. Attention was paid particularly to the conference in these types of reflections. Both conference papers as well as those published in the journal were considered to be ‘inspiring’, ‘interesting’, ‘re-affirming’ and ‘thought-provoking’. The interdisciplinary approach to the psychology of women was also applauded:

“I came back home with new ideas, a list of books and authors, researchers to read, methodologies to discover.”

“Lots of thought provoking presentations”

“It provides a wonderful opportunity to debate and share ideas and I always learn an enormous amount.”

Perhaps due to the “very inclusive and welcoming” environment, POWS was also viewed as particularly supportive and useful for students and early-career researchers. This was highlighted by both those in these career positions, and also those more established in academia. It appeared to be an area of particular pride for some participants that POWS was such a welcoming community to those beginning their careers in Psychology:

“Presenting work in progress from my PhD has been so valuable - the feedback I've had on papers ultimately shaped my analysis”

“...a space to get critical but supportive comments.”

“...it gave me a lot of confidence”

Alongside the conference, the undergraduate and postgraduate prizes as well as the Review were seen as areas where students and early career researchers were supported by POWS. This was seen as especially important for confidence, encouragement and for nurturing people new to the field.

Finally, as a part of the reflections, POWS was viewed as an arena for recuperation. Within the nurturing environment and the community of support and intellectual stimulation it seemed that many respondents also found POWS, particularly the conference and writing retreats, to be sites of recovery:

“Each year I have attended I have come away refreshed and re-energized for the next year of studying and working and I also have my research interests re-affirmed”

“...the retreat offers a break and space to concentrate on work, and to make sure to find time for self-care when living a busy and pressured (academic, Western) world.”

“It's where I go to 'recharge my batteries'.”

POWS was therefore reflected upon as a form of self-care and allowed participants to be re-energised about their work and perspectives following their engagement with POWS events. The support they felt they received at POWS allowed them to approach their work with fresh ideas, vigour and energy.

Radical Futures

In thinking more about the future of POWS, we asked participants what they would make POWS if there was anything at all they could do. Some of the envisioned changes were small but important, others were echoes of previously mentioned concerns and some were incredibly ambitious e.g. creating a global university of women. Here, we have focused on three common areas in which respondents wished to see change. These were often rather revolutionary and the call for a more radical section was clear. This echoed the occasional criticisms when reflecting on the section that it had moved more towards academia and away from activism. Participants' visions for the future surrounded three central areas a) the BPS b) wider Psychology and c) future hopes.

To begin, the first radicalisation that many respondents referred to was around the BPS relationship. It appeared many were aware of past conflict between the BPS and the section in its development. These reflections led to present perceptions of a BPS/POWS tension. One area of conflict appeared to be around beliefs that POWS should be more distinct and separate from the BPS, yet maintain its BPS section affiliation. This distancing and funding dilemma was echoed in several quotes. For example, in the first one below the participant criticised the conference being like a BPS conference or standard conferences. The second and third refer to funding and consider this key to enhancing the section, perhaps to a more global scale. The ongoing concerns about the name and the history of having 'feminisms' in its title also appears to be a wish for the future - which of course it has been since the beginning (Burman, 2011; Capdevila & Lazard, 2015):

“remember thinking that the content of the conference near West London was a bit orthodox and the conference was a bit too like standard conferences”

“an under resourced section the BPS should support further”

“... make the section bigger - global probably, and remove a lot of the nonsense that filters down from the BPS. Definitely rename to include feminism, but I know that won't fly.”

Interestingly, the survey was conducted just months before the name change to Psychology of Women and Equalities and so it is possible this recent alteration may have fulfilled some participants' wish for a more political stance for the section.

Broadening out the scope of the future in relation to wider psychology, POWS was often highlighted as a light in the darkness, or as a ‘buoy’. Just as the conference was reflected upon as being very positive for what POWS is doing for feminism and feminist psychology, participants advocated for this be a continued aim. POWS was celebrated for its existence in light of what is occurring in Psychology more generally. For example, participants highlighted its inherently political nature within the overall apolitical scene of Psychology. Furthermore, several commented on how they wished POWS would not only continue to have an inherent political nature but wanted to further encourage the growth of political activism within the section. Participants were also very reflective about the positioning of POWS within Psychology and aware of the privilege this bestows.

“keep going but enable an effective and porous interface with other aspects of psychology”

“I had no idea how utterly apolitical psychology made political, social issues. POWS is an exception to this. It's feminist, which is essential for our androcentric discipline but also intersectional and more concerned with getting out of the ivory tower than much of psychology. I am buoyed by this.”

“general privilege of academia and how this includes POWS. We are better than much of academic psychology by miles, but relatively better does not mean absolutely better. We do still have to work hard to get out of the ivory tower more and help the very many with much less economic and social capital than we have”

Such reflexivity of respondents demonstrated the positioning of POWS within the BPS and beyond. The critique that POWS remains in the ivory tower of academia and thus benefits from a wealth of privileges was drawn out by several respondents. It was also recognised that this academic standing has the potential to allow people in POWS to use their position to assist and help others with less economics and social capital. In effect, these perspectives show how POWS can become more integrated with other areas of Psychology but also be involved as a movement for social justice in academia.

Such aims draw us to the final section of the ‘radical futures’ theme which is: future hopes. Perhaps unsurprisingly based on the previous excerpts, our respondents wished to see a future of POWS that welcomes, fosters and embodies activism.

“Make it possible to deepen international collaboration such that there are more linkages to other countries' women & gender studies organizations...I think these networks would help to expand upon the types of conversations we have and enrich our collective scholarship and activism”

“I'd also love to see more of the conference come alive beyond that space - i.e. thinking about ways we can be scholar-activists and support each other in doing so. The Facebook group is a great start on this front, and I think is a very helpful place to share our efforts with each other and seek advice; this might be expanded to other ways of remote sharing.”

“I love POWS. But I do feel we have to look at the sum total of our actions. Could we be doing more that's outward facing?”

There was a wish for more ‘outward facing’ activities and engagement, perhaps by thinking about the global position of POWS and how it can engage with academic-activists and activists outside of academia. These responses once again demonstrate the reflexive nature of our respondents and their thinking about their theoretical work within a practical academic system.

Challenges

In light of the reflections and the radical futures imagined by participants there was a number of obstacles highlighted. Indeed, some more accounts present challenges which are faced by POWS and those who engage with POWS. These were often then negated by follow up descriptions of good experiences but the challenges themselves are still worth acknowledging and exploring.

The first key challenge raised was initial feelings of anxiety and intimidation. Some participants reported that their first experience with POWS (while positive afterwards) was initially tarred by feelings of apprehension. Such reports centred on the conference itself. So

despite the arguments made that the conference is ‘like home’, friendly, warm, supportive and nurturing; there was also a level of fear associated with respondents’ first time at POWS.

“I remember feeling so anxious before the first conference, and I wasn't even presenting anything! I think I had a (completely unfounded!) worry that I'd be surrounded by all these intimidating superstar academics, in a really posh venue, in the middle of nowhere.”

“I was incredibly nervous. I had presented at conferences before, but never in the feminist arena and imposter syndrome had not only set in, but had executed a full-blown takeover”

“I was a little nervous! But as soon as I got there I knew I had nothing to worry about”

In review of these quotes, it seems that not only was intimidation an issue but this seemed to be somewhat exacerbated by the attendance of high profile well-established academics thus leading to ‘imposter syndrome’ based fears. In addition, the context and location of the conference seemed to add to these fears. It also appears that it is the distinct ‘feminist’ theme of the conference which added somewhat to the intimidating reputation of POWS. For example, the second quote above identifies the ‘feminist arena’ as a particularly frightening one. The conceptualisation as feminists to be ‘angry’ and therefore frightening seems to be applicable to the academic context. However, as outlined in the quotes above, and reported by many of our respondents, many of these fears were misplaced and soon resolved as they found POWS to be, in contrast to the expectations, a warm and welcoming place.

Nonetheless, the impression of POWS as a potentially intimidating and unwelcoming arena, and its links to broader understandings of feminism, is well worth keeping in mind.

The second key challenge to overcome was participant's important concerns about accessibility to the conference, to membership and to POWSR. This was centrally around visibility and financial accessibility. The pay walls, some BPS membership concerns and some people's ability to engage with POWS because of these accessibility problems were key and demonstrated an awareness of privilege around the ability to engage. For example, with respect to the conference, participants commented that they wanted it to be easier to attend, more visible and "...possible to be a member without ...BPS membership".

In relation to the journal POWSR, participants commented:

"I really want to see it move online and be more widely accessible. There's so much good work in there, and it kills me that it's behind a BPS paywall."

"If we could push it to open access somehow all the better."

Again, these concerns coincide with the reflexive criticisms of POWS as a privileged academic organisation with certain advantages which then go on to exclude on the basis of certain criteria. Participants generally celebrated POWS approach as welcoming and inclusive but continued to wish for it to be as open and accessible as possible, thus echoing the tensions with the BPS regarding membership and accessibility to articles.

Discussion

What is evident from the data presented in this paper is that while some concerns or anxieties were raised by participants, the discussion of POWS was overwhelmingly positive. Whilst we would not want to deter from the power and experiential validity of this narrative, we did feel that its predominance merited further investigation. In a later consideration of the response to her controversial 1995 keynote in which she had been asked to review the history of POWS (2011: 220), Erica Burman reflects that “One significant impact of that event was that the POWS committee subsequently prioritized making the conference a comfortable and supportive place for participants, which it remains to this day, albeit perhaps at the expense of steering clear of debates that could ignite conflict”. Attentive to this interpretation of events, which is itself a dominant narrative within POWS, in this section we consider this affect inflected version of POWS, the expressed dilemma between critique and conformity, along with an exploration of what is and is not (able to be) said.

One of the most common sentiments expressed by participants is succinctly captured by the following quote which provides a general sense of overall well-being: ‘Friendly, joyful, supportive...home!’ Within this sentiment, there was a pervasive sense of POWS as a home, as a space one belongs in and which belongs to you. The Oxford English dictionary provides as one of its definitions of home: *A refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease*. It very much in this sense that the term was used by our participants:

“When I go to a POWS event the sensation of feeling I have gone home, to a place where I can be a feminist”

Along with the overall positive assessment, the specialness of POWS as different to other conferences was also noted by several participants. For example:

“I can honestly say that i do not enjoy any of other psychology conferences as i do at pows.”

“I know that for three days in July we all reunite, listen to incredibly interesting talks, and have a good laugh - whilst enjoying the tranquil Windsor setting and being fed and watered incredibly well by the Cumberland Lodge team.”

Moreover, participants described how, while the conference took place in a limited time frame the benefits were further reaching. This can be particularly seen in the quotes around how the POWS conference is a nurturing environment and have an invigorating and rejuvenating quality.

The use of ‘home’ as a simile to describe POWS is an interesting one. On one hand homes are conceptualised as sites of comfort and belonging, as demonstrated by the dictionary definition and the positive affirmations about POWS. However, as feminist social scientists, we also know that the home is all too often a site for discomfort and feelings of not belonging. Homes are also very often sites of work - domestic and emotional. And similarly, it seems that POWS can be described as a home in this way too.

To consider the home as a site for discomfort and feelings of non-belonging we point to the sometimes juxtaposition of how POWS is occasionally described. It is viewed as a safe haven from androcentric and apolitical Psychology but is also criticised for not engaging with politics and difficult discussions enough. On the one hand, POWS is considered to be the activist critical group it was when it was first formed, but on the other it is criticised for

conforming to a BPS structure. The question therefore of POWS, as well as for individuals within it, is: critic or conformist? This tension is exemplified by the following quotes:

“I would like it to be a bold feminist engagement with and critique of mainstream psychology”

“more 'alternative' in terms of its basic approaches to the discipline of psychology”

“I hate to say this but I think more 'traditional' psychology - we really need to examine and (potentially) criticize the move towards cognitive neuro-science and brain research - but we haven't really taken that stuff on”

“I do not expect that organising within a professional body will lead to much change (good for some careers though!)”

POWS is therefore situated both inside and outside of the Psychology as a discipline. It is viewed as a cosy home but also one that perhaps has some uncertainty within it, consequently its occupants feel occasionally at unease.

As referenced above, the home is also often a site of work, both domestic and emotional, and this is particularly true for women. Whilst the most common response to our survey was overwhelmingly positive and participants reported the nurturing and supportive nature of POWS, no respondent actually identified *who* had supplied this support. Similarly, no one identified themselves as providing the support. In fact, while there was occasionally a reference of the work by the staff at Cumberland Lodge and the food was identified as being particularly good, the actual emotional work being valued so highly is disembodied. It was not identified even in an abstract sense. Groups of academics, for example, the circles of

firmly established and initially-considered intimidating academics, nor the early career networks which often flourish at POWS events, were identified as being responsible for conducting the emotional labour. This work therefore appeared to be invisible. In our exploration of the above analysis, we think it is also important to highlight what is not (able to be) said. While the critical context of POWS and the nature of the field allowed for reflexivity around privilege and the ivory towers of academia, very little reflection occurred about the emotional labour that is so sought after. POWS was framed as being restorative and yet little reference was made to how this was done and by *whom*. There was similarly very little said about why this type of supportive nurturing environment was necessary. It was stated that POWS was a beacon of light within the androcentric and apolitical nature of Psychology but this critique went no further. No one criticised why this beacon of light remains necessary or theorised how Psychology might change to better support feminist and other liberatory projects. Participants rejoiced in POWS presence but this was a passive account of being supported and refreshed. The agent of rejuvenation and comfort is absent with the emotional labour of specific feminists going unrecognised.

(In)Conclusion

Following Hannah Arendt, Lynne Segal posits that “those participating in resistance to or a process of collective deliberations on the harms of the present, sometimes trying to build alternatives, often do find in these strategies sources of fulfilment, resilience, even moments of shared joy” (2017: xiv). This is abundantly reflected in the feminist stories we collected. The same can be said of many of the stories in the PFV collection or in those described by Shields (2017). Such moments of ‘joy’ appear to be particularly valued as the neoliberalism of academia prevails (Gill, 2009). In line with Gill’s (2009) assertion that acts of kindness, generosity and solidarity appear to work *in spite of*, rather than *because of* the structures of

universities and academia, POWS can be understood as perhaps subversive. POWS is framed as a necessity because of prevailing discourses of anxiety and exhaustion in academia as described by Gill (2009). Yet, the actual work conducted at and around this site (mainly by women) remains unattributed to people or even identified as ‘work’.

In reflecting the feelings and experiences of POWS members, we have aimed to open up discussion and start a conversation especially in light of recent changes and the anniversary of POW(E)S. Feminist action, in and outside of academia, is moving at such a fast rate. The past year alone has seen significant national strike action, #immodestwomen and the #metoo campaign reaching academic circles. Our research illustrates how POWES provides a space for discussion and action but participants argued that further amplification of this is needed.

The identity of ‘feminist psychologist’ can be a troubled one as is fully evidenced by a multitude of studies that aim to restore historical absences and ‘oversights’. In this paper we have considered the everyday present experiences of feminist psychologists involved with POWS in effort to understand more about this history. In doing so, we hope to have fulfilled some aspects of Sarah Ahmed beautifully chronicled manifesto for the ‘feminist killjoy’ in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) in which she offers Principle 5: “I am not willing to get over histories that are not over” (p. 262).

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Notes: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 30th Anniversary Annual BPS Psychology of Women Section Conference at Cumberland Lodge in June 2017.

FINAL SUBMITTED VERSION

Appendix 1: Survey questions

Membership

- Are you currently a member of POWs?
- Have you ever been a member of POWS?
- Have you every represented POWS at a non-POWS event?
- Have you ever been a committee member?
- How do you feel about being a POWS member?
- Are you a BPS member?
- Do you belong to any other sections or divisions?
- Which ones?

POWS Conference

- Have you ever attended the POWS conference?
- How many conferences have you attended?
- If you remember, can you tell us which ones you attended?
- Have you every presented at a POWS Conference?
- What kind of session did you present in?
- What are your thoughts on the POWS Conference?

POWS Review

- Do you know about the section journal - the POWS Review?
- Do you ever read the POWS Review?
- Have you ever published in the POWS Review?
- Have you ever been involved with POWS Review? (e.g. a member of the editorial or advisory group)
- Are there any thoughts you would like to share with us about the POWS Review?

POWS Prize

- Have you ever submitted to the POWS Prize?
- What did you think of the experience?

POWS Writing Retreat

- Have you ever attended the POWS writing retreat?
- How many retreats have you attended?
- Would you like to tell us anything about your experience of the writing retreats?

Story completion task

We are interested in people's accounts of POWS and the range of different stories that people tell. We don't expect you to spend too long thinking about what you want to say – just write about whatever first comes to mind.

- My first experience of POWS was when...
- When I think of POWS, I...
- If I could make POWS anything I wanted, I would...

...and finally,

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences of POWS?